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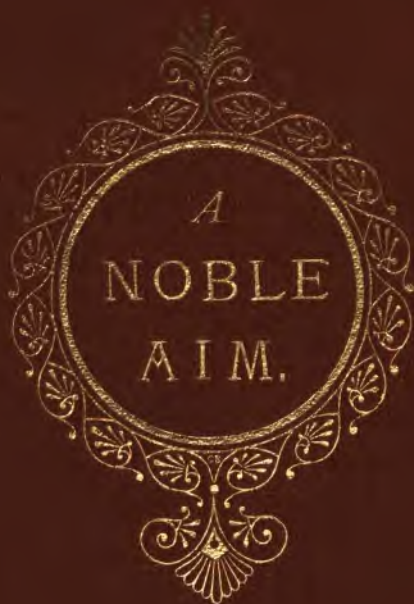
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A NOBLE AIM.



# A NOBLE AIM.

BY

ANNIE THOMAS, (MRS. PENDER CUDLIP.)

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TO  
THE REV. THE HON. CANON CHARLES L. COURTENAY,  
VICAR OF BOVEY-TRACY,  
AND  
WARDEN OF THE DEVON HOUSE OF MERCY,  
THIS STORY  
IS DEDICATED  
BY PERMISSION.



## PREFACE.

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**I**N writing this little tale, which is to be published for an avowed purpose, I have been fettered by the fear of too obviously appearing to force conclusions that are favourable to that purpose. The exigencies of the story as a work of art, often seemed to be incompatible with the exigencies of the story as a work of charity. In my fear of indiscreetly eulogising a most admirable system, I nearly fell into the extreme error of mentioning it too lightly. I have not the presumption to think that I have entirely surmounted difficulties which have barred success from many more fluent and practised writers. But I have the cheering belief that I shall be accredited with having endeavoured to surmount them, and the further belief that the excellence of the cause in which I have plied my pen for the first time will make my readers lenient to what is less good than that cause deserves in the product of it.

ANNIE THOMAS.



# A NOBLE AIM.

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## CHAPTER I.

“AND I CAN DO NOTHING.”

“**T**HAT it may please Thee to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred, and are deceived,” chanted the officiating Priest in the course of the morning service at a metropolitan church, and the words fell upon the ears and fastened upon the mind of one at least in the congregation, with a fuller meaning than they had ever had for her before.

The musical voice sang on, “That it may please Thee to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted : and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.”

“We beseech Thee to hear us, good LORD,” the listener prayed in harmonious response with the white-robed choristers, and then the

all-embracing Litany went on to make prayers and supplications for all men. But the plea that "He would comfort and help the weak-hearted, and raise up them that fall," sounded in the ears of this special devotee in this one temple, as the loudest, the most urgent, the noblest, the best.

She was no suddenly awakened sinner, no worldly and successful votary at the shrine of guilt, no prosperous pagan so well satisfied with the "here," that she dared to affect an indifference no thinking creature can feel about the "hereafter." On the contrary she was a piously brought up little woman, who had acted honestly, conscientiously, and well all her life, according to her lights. But now conviction smote her, and she began to reproach herself, and to feel that her lights had never fallen upon some darksome spots in humanity, which must be seen in their full iniquity before they can be brightened and made purer.

"To comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall." The words sounded in her ears still, when she was driving home from that church in the heart of London where the beauty of holiness had been made so very manifest to her, to her own home in a more western quarter. The voice of the people, *her own amongst* the number, had gone up to

the throne of God in a fervent appeal that He would extend such aid, that He would afford salvation to the weak and the fallen. But how about the duty of the fellow-creatures of the weak and fallen towards these latter? "There must be something for us to do," she thought, and then she added almost hopelessly, "and I can do nothing; there is sin and sorrow, and suffering around me on every side, and I can do nothing."

Her knowledge of these things which she bewailed, sin and sorrow, and suffering, was a purely theoretical thing. Her experience of life until she was twenty had been confined to the midland county village in which her father had preached and prayed for thirty years. The only sound of sin which had reached her there, had been the tale, discreetly told, of the frailty of some girl who had loved not wisely but too well, and who had not been punished for her fault, but had married and restored herself in the good opinion of her local contemporaries: while as for sorrow and suffering, they were matters in that agricultural population, that were dependent on the weather and the crops, and that might be averted by a little timely pecuniary aid. These had been her sole experiences of the great foes to humanity, up to her twentieth year, and then she had married well



and happily, but for all the goodness and happiness of her marriage, she had widened her experiences considerably.

She had married an officer, and gone to India with her husband, and in running the gauntlet of that Indian life, it was next to impossible that her sphere of observation should not have been enlarged. But still the enervating habit of the place was upon her, and she stood apart and pitied people who did wrong, and suffered from the consequences of their wrongdoing ; moreover, Colonel Garth, her husband, made himself the ally of the habit of the place and kept her aloof from all that might shock or annoy her. Without ever having worded his creed to himself even, he did heartily believe that the purity of the purest women is partial ignorance ; in knowledge of some sorts there is taint, he thought, so he kept his wife Edith out of the current of that criminal gossip which flows with freedom in every place where men and women are banded.

So it was that without being cold, or irreligious, or selfish, Mrs. Garth lived on for several years without any special thoughts of others who were less well placed than herself. Directed and counselled by her husband, she often relieved poverty-stricken women, the weeping *widows of soldiers* who had left their wives

nothing to bring up large families upon, save the memory of their bravery in action, and some good-conduct medals. That there were other women about somewhere on the outskirts of the camp who died sometimes of want, and sometimes of ill-treatment, or who equally wretchedly lived on, she knew vaguely. "But the question is a great social one, that will never be healed in my day or yours, my dear Edith," her husband would say, when she ventured to mention it, and then he would go on to talk about "touching pitch and being defiled," until poor Edith would feel that she had been wanting almost in womanly prudence in venturing to question concerning that which she could not cure.

At length sorrow and herself came face to face. Her husband died after a very short illness, but not suddenly nor violently. Still though the manner of his death was gradual, and so not shocking to her as the more abrupt wresting from him of his life would have been, it was very startling. She had loved him very dearly, and she grieved for him very sincerely. Nevertheless, Edith Garth, when at twenty-nine or thirty, she stood alone in the world, a childless widow, fatherless and motherless, was not overwhelmed by the thought of her position. Her first sorrow was a genuine one.

worthy of all sympathy and pity, but it was not a crushing one.

During all these nine or ten years of her married life, Mrs. Garth had never been made to feel herself an accountable creature. She had been guided by her husband safely and well. She had never been guilty of an unkind, a foolish, or a dubious action. Her name was spotless in the most scandalous coteries in which she had mingled for a time. But—she knew it now that she was alone—she had been guided. She had not so much had the path of right pointed out to her, and been counselled to take it because it was right, as she had been shown the way and affectionately but firmly coerced into following it. In fact, she had been carefully treated, and tended like a little child, and as she had been docile, and obedient as a little child, all had been well—she had all the satisfaction of well doing, without the trouble of it.

But now her husband who had indeed been guide, philosopher, and friend to her, was dead, and she stood alone in the world, and—

“A vague unrest  
And a nameless longing filled her breast.”

She began to be discontented with herself for being only passively good. She had come back to *England* and made her home in a west

London suburb; made it comfortably, luxuriously even, as the wealth which was hers to have, and to hold, and to spend as she liked, entitled her to do. And she could not help feeling that there was a little discrepancy between her merits and rewards.

She was not the sort of woman whom one would have supposed would suffer many pangs from a consideration of her butterfly existence. She was brilliant, quick, and apt in conversing on the topics of the day, with that tact which is sometimes vouchsafed to women who are not clever, but who seem to be clever without duplicity, and without effort. Moreover she was pretty and conscious of the fact, and fond of setting off that prettiness and of making herself look her sweet best in the eyes of men. Additionally, she had never been taught other than by the sketchiest precept, that it was her duty to hold a hand out to a sinful sister, or to a man out of whom the stamp of humanity had been almost effaced. On the contrary she had been sedulously guarded from all contact with, or conversation about such. They were; she knew that: more pity for them, and more pity still for the world that had never satisfactorily solved the question of why they were.

But now there was no too careful, too lovingly fearful voice to authoritatively tell her it "was

better not to let her mind dwell on what she could not help." Circumstances now compelled her to direct herself, to determine whether she the mistress of her own actions managed them aright or not? It became a hard task to stultify the pricks of that which we call conscience, sometimes when she sat alone, in comfort, peace, plenty and security, and saw members of that saddest of all sisterhoods flaunting by, and wondered where they were going. Not where they were going in the most exalted sense of the word, but where was their goal here on earth,—whether they, barred as they were, shut out from the mention of good women like herself, by good men like her husband, had ever a friend, save a friend for the hour fallen like themselves, ever a hope, a prospect, a scanty assurance of it being possible for them to do better, and relinquish this degraded game in which they were expending their miserable candles.

"And I can do nothing," she would think, "I can do nothing; if I went to their haunts and talked to them, and gave them money, my influence would last while the money lasted; I can do nothing."

So she thought day after day in sadness of spirit, in the many hours of thought that were *hers in spite of* the heavy social claims of a

large circle of admiring friends. In that quarter in which she lived there seemed a great deal to be done, but she did not know how to set about doing it. She was a fashionable woman, living in a fashionable place! She did not come within the orbit of the clergyman in whose parish she dwelt, and whose church she attended. His time was given to the ragged hems of that fashionable garment which has been thrown over the old court suburb. The sick, and the needy, claimed his days, and his nights were given to those studies which as a theologian he found it necessary to keep up. He had no time to make morning calls, and take "kettle-drums," or to haunt the reunions where he might have met Mrs. Garth.

And it never occurred to her to search for him. Away in the country, in the old days before her marriage, when she had been the Rector's daughter, well up in all village politics, it would have seemed strange to her had any scheme of charity been formed, without her father being in the front of it. But time does work such wonders. She had been away from all parochial influences for so many years, that she had come to look upon clergymen as an abstract idea almost. They were there, to do duty in the church, to pray and preach, to marry and baptise, and bury. But the secular

wealthy power properly administered is the real true one, Mrs. Garth thought as she drove home that Sunday morning from the service where the musically earnest cry that God should raise up those who are fallen, had made such an impression on her.

She went home, driving through the park on her way, taking a sweep that divides Kensington Gardens from Hyde Park, and as she drove on and marked those who were assembling for the four o'clock promenade, her soul grew very sad. There were so many to be reclaimed ! The grades in the army of misery and sin were so many. "And I can do nothing," she almost moaned, and then she lifted up her head, and said, "I'll try."

## CHAPTER II.

### SOLITARY-HEARTED.

**I**T has been told that Mrs. Garth was a fashionable woman, a dweller in a fashionable quarter, and that she was very much in the society of a circle of admiring friends. Moreover, in addition to these social claims to which she attended with effortless punctuality, she had what are conventionally called, "resources within herself;" that is to say, she had retained enough of the instruction that had been bestowed upon her in her girlhood, to be able to caricature any landscape that appealed sufficiently to her taste to make her desire to reproduce it in water-colours, and she could sing Italian opera airs in a way that did not remind her hearers of Patti, and English ballads that brought no half-forgotten strains of Madame Sainton Dolby's voice to the most flatteringly disposed of her audience. Further, she had a great love of reading,—a taste that had never



been properly developed or guided,—a taste in fact that had been checked in her girlhood for want of literature, and checked after her marriage by her husband's fear of literature.

Colonel Garth had many noble and commendable qualities, but the power of analysis was not one of them. He would condemn every work of imagination with which he did not happen to be acquainted, because some few with which he did happen to be acquainted were not without reproach. He would denounce all pictures of life with which he did not chance to be familiar as untrue, dangerous, and demoralising. He would recommend to the perusal of his wife, poorly written records of uninteresting facts, or of facts that seemed uninteresting and unimportant because they were so poorly chronicled. It was his perverse judgment, or perverse fate, never to come upon noble themes nobly worded. He lacked that fine instinct which detects the gold in the midst of much literary dross; he could not separate the true metal from the sham; and as he could not do it himself, he fancied or feared that his wife might be unable to do it also. So rather than risk any taint to her pure, sweet, ignorant mind, he denied her what would have been a great pleasure, and might have been a beneficial one had

he known how to play the part of censor to her literature properly.

Naturally,—for she was an active-minded woman,—she no sooner found herself perfectly free to follow her own sweet will in all things, than she fell back upon the old unsatisfied love for reading, and read voraciously, miscellaneously, in a desultory way, that made her friendly not only with the best but the worst authors. She enervated, she wearied, she weakened herself over volumes that dealt with love and crime, with life and death, with the highest and the holiest things, in a poor tricky manner that was palpably only intended to tickle the curious palate, and make it itch for more of the same sort of unskilfully spiced matter. That is to say, she read many books to which this description answers, and many others that came in like tonics and restored the tone of her mental digestion. For there is much that is strengthening and elevating, as well as much that is enervating and degrading in modern fiction. It is as far from my wish as it is from my power to in any way deteriorate from the estimate formed by those capable of justly estimating the relative value of the heterogeneous mass of three-volume literature that daily emanates from the press. No nobler pictures of self-abnegation have ever been

painted than those which George Eliot has limned forth. From the teachings of that royal-souled artist we learn—or we may learn—as lofty lessons of self-control, of patience under provocation, of suffering simply borne, of the evil effects of vanity, of the utter emptiness of a good many sublunary things in short, as can be learnt from any other pages save those of the great preacher who avowed that all was vanity “under the sun.”

It would be easy for me while I am on this theme to write for many pages pæans of praise of my fellow-novelists. I could point out to the censoriously-inclined many a good lesson grandly enforced in its perfect simplicity, many a strong incentive to some reader to go and do well likewise forcibly expressed in some tale of imagination that has never emerged from obscurity. But to do so here, would be to wander from my purpose, which is to set forth a few of Edith Garth’s mistakes, and why she made them.

It was perhaps because she read aimlessly, because she read just to pass away the hours that were not occupied even less worthily by the great social throng who sought her and made much of her, that she found her reading like everything else insufficient. When the *book was put down*, it was read. When the

song was finished, it was sung. When the pleasing landscape was reproduced more or less well, it was done, and there was an end of all pleasure about it. Nothing gave satisfaction long,—nothing lasted,—nothing was so good in itself that she could return to it, and let her mind dwell upon it, and tell herself with truth that she had got any good out of it. She grew mournfully discontented with herself, and with that fate which had placed her so comfortably and so uselessly in the world. And as she was young still, and full in reality of a strong, healthy vitality, the discontent strengthened the more she saw of the sin and sorrow and suffering in others which she was so powerless to heal.

It was a painful state of mind, when casually considered, for so young, bright, well-placed a woman: she was put in such a position that for herself she could need nothing,—at least it seemed on the surface that she could need nothing,—and yet she felt herself to be lacking in the great thing, the one thing, the worthy motive power.

The poor little hazel-eyed woman with the softly complexioned oval face, and the bright silky dark hair, felt herself to be most sorely tried for a time when it was first made manifest to her, when she first evolved it out of her own

consciousness, that she, one of the daintiest butterflies that ever fluttered in the sun of prosperity, was really much lower in the scale of usefulness and worth than the dingiest bee that ever hummed. To some people it comes easily and naturally to fall upon the doing of good works, no matter how uncongenial or repugnant to fastidiousness those works may be; while to others the doing of the same things may be a physical suffering, that no sense of duty can ever render other than painful and distasteful. It is hard to declare to whom the crown of merit belongs,—but it is not difficult to decide which of the two struggles the most in the endeavour to do right.

At any rate, Mrs. Garth strenuously struggled against the traditions of her girlhood, which had sedulously kept her from practical knowledge of all things that were unpleasant, struggled with the indolent habits of her married life, which had striven to do away with anything like a sense of responsibility in her. She was a good little woman, one who was imbued, as all good women are, with a profoundly reverential spirit, and this spirit would have made her search into the evils she might assuage, and do all the good she could in the course of her march through life, had she not been checked by the thought that her best

friends, her wisest counsellors, had always deemed it better that she should not run the risk of personal contact, and possible contamination. But, in spite of the gaiety of it, in spite of the gay daily pleasure of it, in spite of the sufficiency of all the elements of mere personal enjoyment that she had about her, the "vague unrest" deepened. Her young romance had expended itself (so she thought) in her marriage. Besides, even if she fell in love again, that would not occupy all her time, she knew, when the first fever of it was over. Like thousands of other women, she was conscious of having a great gift of time upon her hands, which she did not know how to employ, of a great fund of interest in her heart which she did not know how to invest. There was nothing that she was obliged to do in the world, save to dress and go out to dinner. And this exemption from labour is a heavy curse.

How heavily it falls on households where there are one or more daughters, full of health and physical activity, who are not compelled by the exigencies of their situation to expend a certain quantity of these things in work that must be done. The life of the great majority of girls in the middle and upper classes, must be a continual and almost unconscious struggle

against the degrading influence of sloth and mental rust. They are, as a rule, void of an end or aim, beyond the dinner-party of to-morrow, and the dance of next week. They, as Longfellow bids us, "act, act, in the living present," certainly. But then the present is only looked upon as a stepping-stone to some illusory future which a pink silk or a white tulle is supposed to be able to compass. They drift along through the days and weeks in a fitfully feverish state, if they are excitable, in a dully lethargic one if they are lymphatic,—hopeful (in the face of facts) of something brilliant befalling them and brightening their whole future existence, when they achieve,—or rather *should* they achieve,—the great object for which they seem to think they were born, and win the new name and the magical ring.

Without being an eager votary of my sex's "rights," as they are technically called, without desiring to hear of women voting, and of infatuated boroughs returning fascinating members, I, as a woman writing about women, would like to make my voice heard in the plea that an extended sphere of occupation should be accorded to the educated mass of them. The root of bitterness in my sex is idleness,—an *idleness* that very frequently takes the form of

most pernicious business,—an idleness that gives them time to ponder over “trifles light as air,” until they (the trifles) appear to those who ponder “confirmation strong as proofs of Holy Writ” of something that they hope, or fear, or dread, or suspect. To the young women who spend the principal portion of their home life in light needlework and lighter gossip, love—the noblest passion of which the heart is capable—love itself becomes a snare and a delusion. Crouched to, encouraged, abjectly bowed before, the great monarch who can rule so wisely and so well, becomes a cruel autocrat, and drives his serfs to madness or to crime very often. In all psychology there is a no more painful study than this one of the ill-gotten effects of watching, waiting, and wearing for what may never come, on the female brain. Surely a definite object in life would to a great extent obviate this evil? Surely there are thousands who must in the order of things be roughly blown upon by fortune’s winds when their parents die—unless as the shallow euphemism has it, they “are otherwise provided for.” Girls may be too closely garnered,—human nature is very ductile, and daughters are easily imbued with the belief that they are not fitted to battle with anything more antagonistic to them than a contumacious



milliner, or tardy lover. But since they are so ductile, it would surely be as well to imbue each one with the feeling that the greater good of the greater number is the principle that works best in the world, and that therefore the more she as an individual does for herself, the less strain there will be on the powers of others for her. Study the specialties in fact of those who have a specialty, and teach the mediocre-minded something mechanical.

## CHAPTER III.

### • INTANGIBLE TROUBLES.

IN the round of social intercourse it must often strike everybody that there is a painful hollowness, if that social intercourse be made the great object, and the intervening time and events be treated as disagreeable though necessary evils and episodes. This feeling became Edith Garth's habitual companion in these days of which I am writing. The nothingness of the life she was leading, harmless and inoffensive as it was, jarred upon her instinct about the life that it would be worthy for her to lead.

She would stand at the window in the morning, and see the men, the merchants, and government clerks, going out to meet and bear their share of the burden and heat of the day, —the peripatetic vendors of all things that were not needed by her, but that must be demanded by some people, since their supply was an ob-

ject in, and a means of life for others,—and seeing them she envied them all for that definite aim in the world which she had not got. “If I had children or poor relations,” she would say repiningly, never thinking what a wearing duty the charge of these latter would have most surely become, had they existed and fathomed her feeling that she was bound to take care of them. And then as she had no children, and no poor relations, and no cares of any sort, she began to vex herself into the belief that she was a “little out of health,” and took to tending an imaginary bodily ailment until it became a real mental one.

“A feeling of general depression, and, yes, certainly, of weakness and languor,” Mrs. Garth said in reply to her doctor’s questions concerning her, when at length she called him in.

“You should get out more into the open air,” he said, “you ride, why confine yourself to the monotonous row day after day? go for a good gallop over some of the Surrey hills.”

She shrugged her shoulders by way of answer.

“You don’t care for country riding?” he interrogated.

“Yes, I do,” Edith said quickly, “at least I *should care very much* for it if it were a change

for me to have fresh air, and quiet and time to think; but I can have fresh air and quiet, and time to think, all day long and every day if I like."

"You are embarrassed by your blessings and privileges," he said, seriously.

"I am rather bored out of all appreciation for them," she answered. "Oh, dear me, doctor," she continued, almost humbly, "how badly you must think of me! you who must constantly be brought in contact with women who have something tangible to complain of, and to be miserable about."

There was too much warm humanity about the woman who spoke for any one, much less a kindhearted man, to "think badly of her;" he only said in reply,

"I do see a great deal of suffering of one sort and another,—it has been my daily experience for the last forty years to hear or to feel some appeal for help which I am unable to give."

"That would be a life of torture to some people," Mrs. Garth said, in a pitying tone, and she looked as if she thought that the people to whom it would have been torture were blessed with a finer organisation, a higher sensitiveness than the one on whom she looked could claim. But though the practice of his

calling, and the habit of his mind had taught him to read the language of the face with tolerable facility, he did not answer her as though he had read and interpreted her thought.

"There is a reverse to the shield, Mrs. Garth," he said, "it would be torture to see and to feel one's inability to do good without cessation. It is within my daily experience also to soothe many a bodily or mental affliction; to give help and hope,—hope, the best gift after all, one human being can give another."

"That is a golden side of the shield; but you held up such a leaden-hued one to my vision at first that I began to wonder how you could be callous enough to continue your calling; after all,"—she kindling to the interest she imagined,— "the law of compensation works very well in your profession; what romances you must be continually discovering and half discovering,—some of them poetical, and some—"

"Hideous,—and some very, very touching," he interrupted; "my dear lady, the field is wide, and I should be glad to see you till it."

"You don't mean that you would like me to follow in the footsteps of Doctor Mary Walker, do you?" she asked, laughing.

"There are other paths across that great

desert of suffering and sorrow than the one she has taken; paths in which you would have what all women want, a precedent; you'll be a better and a happier woman when you have seen how much more miserable than yourself thousands of your fellow-creatures are."

"That knowledge is the cause of my being miserable at all," she said, discontentedly; "you have misunderstood me utterly, utterly; if it were not for the weight that knowledge is on me I should be the happiest creature alive, for I should never reproach myself with leading a frivolous idle life: you have quite misunderstood me."

"Out of the phase of feeling you are suffering from have sprung all the loftiest efforts humanity has made to aid, to strive to save humanity," he said, rising up to say good-bye. Then he glanced out of the window, and said, "Look here at an earnest, self-abnegating glorious example of it," and Mrs. Garth went to the window just in time to see a little car containing two women robed in the black garb of conventualism driving by.

"Nuns driving about?" she asked.

"Sisters of Charity, their home is at Kensington,—they are attached to the Roman Catholic Church, and they are Catholic indeed in the aid they extend to the poor and afflicted of

every district into which they penetrate ; they are ' Poor Sisters,' they are driving about now to beg from house to house for such food and clothing as can be given ; they do an immensity of good ; their presence in the foulest haunts of ruffianism is like a sign of peace descending on the spot."

" But mightn't they do it just as well in every-day dress, individually ?" Mrs. Garth questioned.

" They haven't the private means, I believe," the doctor replied. And then, as he had a great dislike to arguing on any point on which he was not particularly strong, he took his leave, and Mrs. Garth ordered her carriage round " at once." The desire to go out and do good to the poor and afflicted, had come upon her, and she would not quench it. But she was determined to do it in her own way, to seek out deserving cases for herself, to personally investigate, and in fact to act individually. So she filled her purse with a sum that would have bought up the contents of the little car of charity, had they been thrice as costly as they were, and then she drove away, feeling dubious but hopeful, towards one of the worst purlieus of the suburb in which she lived.

Her early narrow training, the years during *which she had lived* under the influence of the

strong conservatism of her husband, all made her averse to the notion of acting in unison even in the best cause with women who banded themselves together, and in token of such banding wore straight long garbs of black serge, and white wrappings over their heads. As she passed in sight of the quiet convent of the Poor Sisters she did wish she could find out how they went to work to do the good they did, without directly asking them. But her old prejudices came to her aid, and made her determine to rely solely on herself. So with a little fear and trembling she got down at the opening of a grim alley, and adventured into its perilous pathway between its broken pavements alone.

These darksome haunts which disfigure our great cities, especially London, are places from which any woman may be forgiven for shrinking in terror, however high and holy her object in visiting them may be. They are grim, ghastly vistas down which we are compelled to gaze sometimes as we drive through the less luxurious parts of town, and on a superficial survey their external features are all the same. At the entrance by day, there is almost sure to be a policeman or two and a couple of those sad-looking grey dogs who turn up on the shortest notice, on the smallest excitement of-



fering. And there are sure to be two or three of the brigands of England about, who are not picturesque by any means, men who do not wear the costume so common to their Italian brethren in fiction and masked balls, but who wear their hands in what were once pockets in their own habiliments when they are not in the pockets of the passers-by, with upper lips longer than their noses and foreheads combined, and scratches that are given them by their spouses and sweethearts, and the other gentle beings who make life sweet in that locality.

There are always women standing about, and small, preternaturally sharp girls ; and the former have the clear grey-shot-with-red eyes of the habitual gin-drinkers and alley-brawlers. Women out of whom all womanhood has fled, —fierce, hardened, terrible creatures ! yet they have the indelible stamp upon them, they have not been wholly wrong all through their fearful life.

As for the little girls who are dotted about, punctuating these pages of the great book of human life, what things they are to behold and to shrink from in their miserable precocity, and hideous facility for seizing upon the worst of their parents' salient points. They are miniature editions, perfect copies reduced of the *worst of their elders*, as they stand there with

their arms rolled up after the manner of gossips, and thin lips protruding, drinking in as it were, every sound relative to the current topic. They are awful things to behold, and to shrink from, these precocious alley Aspasia's, these mothers that will be of the future generation of murderers and housebreakers.

The heart of the lady quailed and went down in despondency, when she first entered this place. It quailed and went down still lower in dread and disgust as she proceeded along it. She almost lost sight of her own motives in being there, in the sudden fear that possessed her. Where was she to begin, and how was she to begin? There was want and squalor, vice and malignity: especially this latter, especially malignity towards herself, Mrs. Garth thought, as she looked round tremblingly, and almost apologetically on her alarming surroundings.

How to begin? and where to begin? The one question was as difficult to answer as the other. Mouths of Hades all the doorways looked, and though an angel might safely enter there, Edith Garth knew she was no angel and feared to cross the thresholds. As for addressing one of those unsexed women, or prematurely debased girls, she dared not do it, being there she felt without the semblance of

authority, open to all sorts of misapprehension and distrust on the part of those around her.

All this fear and feeling, this dread and disquietude, pass through her soul in the course of her progress along the first few yards of the alley : in the space of a minute imagination is quite able to crowd a goodly amount of the most unpleasant thoughts and sensations. At the end of the few yards she bethought herself that it was but a purposeless and weak thing on her part, this wandering along without making an effort to heal.

She turned round timidly, and looked in the face of one of the most typically vicious-looking women, in that typically vicious-looking place. And the woman returned her timid glance with one of stony unconcern, it was a matter of stony unconcern to the poor lost abandoned creature, off whom the hall mark of humanity had been nearly effaced, what the majority who looked at her might "think" or "feel," they "did" nothing.

But Mrs. Garth refused to be crushed by the mask of indifference now that she had gone so far. She stopped and asked in the most insinuating tone of voice of which she was mistress, "Can you tell me of any sickness, or any one who wants relief in this street?"

*The woman*—she was a large brawny woman,

ragged, dirty, mottled in the face, breathing gin and defiance, and antagonism to all who came surrounded by an atmosphere of purity or plenty—faced round slowly, and looked at Mrs. Garth with a slight access of interest.

“There’s plenty of sickness here, and plenty who want relief,” she said with a short laugh, “you’ll find them easy enough, without me showing you.”

A little child or two had crept nearer to them during this short colloquy, and a man had scraped his shoulders along the wall, and his feet along the pavement to be within earshot. The poor inexperienced well-meaning lady felt herself to be at a sad disadvantage. “These people,” she thought, judging the majority from the individual example offered to her, after the manner of tyros, “These people have no tact, they will not aid me to aid them,” and forthwith she felt heartsore, and dejected at this failure which had attended her preliminary effort towards the relief of those around her who needed it. “These human beings, they would not respond to her most sympathetic advances,” she told herself in a sudden access of disappointed feeling, “even her dog leapt up to answer a kind word, and her mare rubbed its nose gratefully against her shoulder when she gave it bits of sugar; dumb

animals were more sympathetic undoubtedly, clearly the lower orders had no nice feelings to work upon." So thinking she bestowed a gold coin upon the woman who had given her such information as she had received, and then hurried away back to her carriage, mightily oppressed with what she mistakenly believed to be the truth, namely that it was not her vocation to do good, and be useful in her generation save through the medium of others.

With youth and wealth, health and beauty, in her possession, Mrs. Garth suffered terribly from a great want. She had no object in life, and she did not know how to make one for herself. Day in and day out, there was no call for her to take thought, or to take heed, made upon her. Life went smoothly with her, the pursuit of pleasure was made easy to her, she was shown the path to it by people who were pleasant to the eye, and congenial to her taste. At the end of every day she had the conviction that the next day would roll over her head just as softly as the one that had passed, that if she heard of any place which she desired to see, she could go to it; that if she saw anything she desired to possess, she could buy; that if she was satiated with society, she could have solitude, and that when she was sick of solitude she *could have society*; that in all things while she

lived and was well, she could, thanks to her generous husband, do as she liked. Still, firmly as she believed this, she wearied much in the midst of all her happiness, and peace, and plenty, and thought how enviable the feelings of those women must be, who have an object in life, and who see that object nearing them as they labour on towards it.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MRS. GARTH'S NEIGHBOURS.

**A**BOUT five or six doors lower down, on the opposite side of the street to the house in which Mrs. Garth lived, a widow lady dwelt with her unmarried son and daughter. For many months Mrs. Garth's acquaintance with them extended no further than it did with most of the other denizens of the quarter,—that is to say, she knew them by sight, felt certain that they knew her by sight, and attended the same district church with them. The mother was a white-headed, dignified old lady of sixty,—the daughter was a tall plain woman of thirty-five or six, who still affected girlish hats and jaunty jackets, and the son was three or four years younger than his sister, and without looking either hardworked or in a hurry, gave people who saw him the *impression of being an active, busy, successful*

investor of the talent of time that was allotted him.

Gradually Mrs. Garth came to know that these people's name was Theed, that the mother was the widow of a man who had invented something,—whether that something was a needle-gun, or a dye, a rocket, or some specially strong tape, Mrs. Garth's informant was unable to say,—whatever the service he had rendered to his country or to humanity at large, he had been rewarded for it by knighthood, so his widow was Lady Theed, and behaved herself accordingly to the respectable people, his relations, when they dared to remind her that the same blood ran in the veins of the lucky knight as ran in theirs.


Jerry Theed, as he had been called before his elevation, Sir Jeremiah, as he was less euphoniously dubbed afterwards, had struggled up into prosperity and notoriety from a very poor and insignificant stratum, and he never forgot that he had been helped to rise by his wife. With his usual good fortune he had married early in life a gentlewoman and an ambitious woman, and she had spared no pains to urge him on and up. While he was poor she saved for him cheerfully, when he grew rich she spent for him judiciously. She was in all respects indeed a wife to be trusted, a



woman to be relied upon by the man to whom she had vowed allegiance, and he did trust her and rely upon her most thoroughly.

Even to this extent, it was found, when he died and his will was read, that he had left everything to his widow, nothing to his children save a recommendation to them to "study their mother's wishes in all things," for the enforcement of which recommendation he left them entirely dependent upon her. She literally held their fortunes in her hands, and some way or other the habit of their mother had been upon them so all their lives that the young Theeds deemed it no hardship that it should be so.

To the self-made man she had been all that a wife ought to be, and he was right to reward her fidelity, her self-abnegation, her unceasing regard for his interest, in a worthy manner. But as events proved he was not right in making her the arbiter of his children's fortunes. Lady Theed was a woman with a speciality, the speciality of being an excellent wife. She was not a "perfect woman, nobly planned," any more than are the majority of women one meets in this world. Accordingly, her sense of unbounded sway over them made her a less just mother than she had been a wife, *caused her to appear more frequently in the*



light of gracious patroness than generous parent.

For awhile circumstances so willed it, that the results of her uncontrolled rule should seem good. For instance, Miss Theed in the heat and ardour of youth, was once or twice on the point of making life-long engagements that no reasonable human being could suppose could make her other than profoundly miserable. On each of these occasions she was saved from taking the fatal step, by the magnanimous withdrawal on the part of the aspirant to her hand,—conduct that was caused by her mother's frankly making known the very precarious nature of her daughter's hopes of a fortune in the future. "Esther is old enough to please herself certainly," the candid lady said, "quite old enough; I was married years before I was her age; the only objection I see to the marriage is that you'll have nothing to live upon."

"That would be an objection if it were not for their reliance on Lady Theed's kindness and generosity," the lovers had hinted. To which Lady Theed had replied, that "those who relied upon her kindness and generosity must act in accordance with her judgment," and her judgment was certainly not in favour of young people marrying upon nothing more

negotiable than a reliance on those first-named qualities.

Whether mercenary motives had anything to do with it, or whether it was entirely owing to a manly disinclination to make a daughter act disobediently, cannot be decided here, but the result was that in all cases Miss Theed was released from the vows she had made, and was now at five-and-thirty, Miss Theed still, with every prospect of remaining so.

Over her son, too, the mother's influence, backed by interest, had been beneficially exerted. From his earliest boyhood, she had taken care that he should have good well-authenticated instruction. She never attempted to economise in the education of her boy, but when he went to Oxford she told him in the plainest words that if he incurred debts there for things which he could do without, he would be a weighted man all his life, for she would never pay them.

During his University career, Arthur Theed had given his mother one great anxiety. He had believed a girl who looked good and pure, disinterested and fondly attached to him, to be what she looked, though he had never sought to inspire the affections, or searched for the *good qualities*,—all were thrust upon him, and *he really believed* them to be honours when he

was only nearly won by tricks. However, here again his mother's absolute authority over the fortunes of her children, and her candid exposition of the same, served him in good stead. Lady Theed did not seek to coerce her son, she only told him that he must subject his affianced to the test of hearing the truth, namely that his marriage with her would oblige him to fight his way in life, without hope of ever benefiting by his mother's money. "I agreed to marry your father when he offered to share no better fate than that with me," she said, "why should she be more fearful and less loving?" Why indeed? Nevertheless, she was. Her disinterested affection shrank from the trial, and Arthur Theed could not doubt her recovery of the blow to her hopes, since six weeks afterwards she married a friend of his own who did not happen to be dependent on his mother.

Undeniably, Lady Theed was justified in thinking this a good sound stroke of maternal policy. It was sufficiently apparent that she had by the exertion of her united gifts of power and discernment, saved her son from a union with a woman who cared for what he might have, instead of loving him for what he was. She felt that she had done a good thing, a thing for which it behoved Arthur to be very grateful; and moreover she had the satisfaction

of knowing that Arthur felt it too. Unfortunately, this first successful and praiseworthy exertion of the mighty instruments she had wielded so well, made her long to keep them from rusting by doing it again and again. She loved her son, but it was with a jealous grasping love that made her crave to keep him from being the recipient of any other all his life. "You may think what you will," she would say, "but no one will ever love you as your poor mother does," and then she would quote the incident that has been narrated, and tell how sorely Arthur would have been deceived but for her.

So for many years after Arthur left college, things went pleasantly and smoothly enough in the Theed family. The sway of the mother was complete, but it was not severe, for there was no opposition offered to it. Miss Theed had given up all hopes of making for herself newer and dearer interests than any she had ever known, and so centred all the affection she was capable of feeling, and all the interest she was capable of expressing, in her mother and her brother, and herself. She fortunately saw no other course opened to her, fell into contracted grooves of monotony, found the trivial local gossip absorbing, and the smallest household events engrossing, and was generally satisfied to muddle away existence without an end

or aim beyond the day, after the manner of moderately endowed women, who are not compelled to labour for subsistence. Her brother gave a breadth and depth to the social atmosphere she lived in, which would have been lacking had he not been there, but she never quite widened to the one, or fathomed the other. His influence was better than nothing, but still it was not great.

Indeed his influence ought to have been more beneficial than it was, for many reasons. Amongst others that he was mentally and morally infinitely the superior of those with whom he dwelt. He was a clever man and a good man, and these two qualities of his, though they were constantly vaunted by his mother and sister, were neither understood nor appreciated by them. They were both proud of him, because they dimly recognised in him talent which they had not. But for all their pride in him and unspoken belief in the superiority of his judgment to theirs and everybody else's, they would not hesitate to thrust their own upon him at every turn, and would develop affectionate but most wearing resentment when he declined to act in accordance with it.

Mr. Theed was by nature and by education and habit, an eminently self-denying man. He had often at the instance of his mother given

up pursuits and acquaintances that were pleasant and harmless to him, and he had done it cheerfully because he loved her, and loved to please her, and with no thought of the ultimate good it might do his prospects with her. There had been a time when the thought that he might do something with the brains God had given him, besides auditing accounts, in a certain branch in a government house, had struck him : a time when a dream of literary fame, of power to be gained by his pen, of a name in the annals of letters, was dreamt by him. But this dream his mother disbelieved in, and strove with all her power to dispel. A literary life seemed to her a life that was spent in doing things for which there was no need, and for which there was less remuneration. Politics did not appeal to her, fiction was a thing her grandmother and mother before her had frowned upon, and Lady Theed was intensely conservative, so she frowned upon it also. "You will do as you like, Arthur," she said when he mooted the subject to her, in that way she had of never verbally coercing her children, "You will do as you like, I should be sorry that my son should feel I interfered with anything that he felt to be his vocation : but understand that I set my face against it, that I shall always feel *pain in the thought* of your contributing a line

to the mass of writing that causes both men and women to waste so many precious hours of their lives." This Lady Theed said while she was making a wool mat that was ugly in itself, and designed to support a vase that was still uglier, and that would not hold anything.

"Shall I be doing anything better if I don't enter the press-ranks, mother?" he said, and there was some truth in the letter of Lady Theed's answer, "You may find many better things to do, Arthur." Some truth in the letter, but not in the spirit, for the "better things" which Lady Theed wished him to do were in connection with a turning-lathe and a box of tools, out of which in imagination she saw endless brackets and work-tables spring.

But though he was self-denying in this matter of relinquishing the attempt to fulfil what he felt to be a mental obligation, he was not equal to the effort it would have been to him to relinquish a moral one. Against the great active interest he felt for the desolate and afflicted, for the erring and the repentant among his fellow-creatures, he would suffer no appeal to be made. The good, the quiet unobtrusive good which he could do to either their souls or bodies, he would do while he had the power.

It did not satisfy him merely to be a generous giver to every good cause which it came



within his power to befriend. Had it done so his sphere of usefulness would soon have come to an end, for the funds which he could command were far from inexhaustible. He knew that if he desired that this influence for good which he was seeking to establish over the minds of those who might fall under his sway, was to last, he must found it on something better than the precarious character any charity derived from his mother would have. It must emanate from himself, and be felt to be dependent on himself. It must be no easy gift, no good thrown off in hours of idleness if it was to bear upon it the stamp of reality. It must be offered at some sacrifice of time, of pleasure, of that peaceful domestic life which was so torpor-inducing. So he felt, and so at a great disadvantage as regarded age and means, and the habits of a lifetime, he commenced the study of one of the many diseases which afflict humanity, pursued it under the best tutelage, and finally did not "master it," but learnt to know it well, and to aid it skilfully, and gained for himself the boon of an entrance with authority to those homes of sickness and sorrow, the hospitals.

It was about the time of her own failure in this field of striving to save, that Mrs. Garth *became acquainted* with Mr. Theed, and with

the story of his triumph over difficulties, and against circumstances that were friendly to her had she but persevered. She heard of him first in society, in the gay brilliant set in which she moved constantly and he but rarely now, heard of him thrillingly, in the way society, hollow as it is called, does delight in sounding forth the just praises of a man who combines Good-Samaritanism with great science. He had offended his mother, people said, by giving up the official certainty, for the medical uncertainty. He was making her still more unhappy by the wholesale attendance he gave to people who could never pay him. He was confining his practice principally to a class from whom no honourable mention could be gained, and from this work no maternal threats of disinheritance could turn him.


Need it be said that he became a hero to the heart of the unemployed woman over whom no one had any control? That surmounting of difficulties which he had achieved had in it just those elements of the heroic which she was best prepared to admire. She longed to know him, to meet this man face to face, who had sacrificed no chimera, but a tangible good-to-himself, in his earnest-hearted desire to do good to his kind.

He was a hero to her, and so when she met him at last she felt as though her own soul

must be bare before him, it had been so full lately of him and of his deeds.

Hero-worship (more especially if the worshipper and worshipped be not both well stricken in years) is apt to mislead beholders. Some of its salient points bear a strong resemblance to love. There is the same blind belief, and wild anxiety, and tenderness to the shortcomings of the object—the same pleasure in the mere fact of its presence—the same jealousy of the grand creature coming off its pedestal for another,—the same humble, futile, foolish identification of oneself with its hopes and triumphs and failures, its aspirations and despairs, and defeats. Above all, there is the same sufficiency, for the time it lasts, about it. Nothing else is sought, nothing else is needed. The true devotee kneels with his back to the world, and sees and cares for—only the shrine.

As a rule, the hero-worshipper who would keep the faith should flee from the possibility of personal intercourse with the man or woman he has come to love in type. The æsthetic part comes before you in the flesh, a rubicund, rotund man, loose in attire, looser in address, and all his music is mute in your soul when you see him, and you marvel how honest nature can be guilty of such gross mistakes, such *fearful misfittings* of mind to matter.



Or in the course of the march of life you come upon one of your favourite novelists, and find that all his wit, and all his good geniality are reserved for his writings. Or you find her who pours out pathos by the page, pathos so terribly true that you are plunged into low spirits for a week after reading it, you find her a brawny, badly-bred woman, void of all those tender tricks, those furtive fascinations, with which she so liberally endows her heroines. The man who has made refinement a religion to you, strikes at the foundation of that religion by showing you how coarse he its high priest can be. You sigh for your hopes of belief in and hero-worship for the unseen. But when the real comes up to the ideal, then it is all up with the possibility of proving a renegade to a faith at once so soothing and exciting. A religion more of the soul than the heart, and more of the head than either, its trammels are not to be thrown off lightly, and the vacuum that is felt should the emptiness of it be proved, may not be easily filled up. Was I right in saying just now that some of the salient points of hero-worship bear so strong a resemblance to love as to be liable to mislead beholders?

So now, whether the feeling was admiration, zeal for the man's good qualities, or love for the man himself, Mrs. Garth did not ask her-

self. She had excellent reasons to give for that desire to know more of him which possessed her so powerfully, had he not cut out a path through briars and thorns, and across stony places, towards the furtherance of an aim which had long seemed a noble one to her. If he would only be her counsellor about the means she should use and her guide to the haunts where help was most needed! if he would only be these things, she felt that she could cast off the slothful habits social indulgences had engendered in her, and work for good unceasingly without waiting to see proofs of the progress she made.

For some time she had no opportunity of winning his interest for her endeavours,—or at least for the endeavours she was desirous of making. Their paths crossed sometimes, but rarely, and then it was in some scene that was opposed to what she believed to be the man's intensest interest. But at length one of her own servants fell ill, baffled the judgment of the doctor who was first called in to attend her, and was finally sent to one of the hospitals in whose wards Mr. Theed was most unremittingly in attendance.

No one to whose lot it has not fallen to walk the wards of a hospital, to face the sick and *the dying* at every turn, can imagine the ordeal

it was to this untrained woman with whom I am dealing to pass through to her servant's pallet. On every side of her were lying suffering examples of the consequences of sin and folly, and crime, and misfortunes. On one straight narrow bed the bright eyes and the beautiful bloom, and the touchingly hopeful glance of consumption in its last, worst, and most self-delusive form, claimed a moment's regard and an everlasting pity. Hard by, sunk in the lethargy of despair of all things, here was all that was left of what had originally been bright and womanly and truthful, a woman with the glory of womanhood gone from her face and her soul, a fallen star on whose shortcomings the world has been so hard that surely Heaven will hear the prayers she only feels and dares not utter,—a Magdalen who can bring no alabaster box of precious ointment, nothing save her tears to her SAVIOUR's feet. Next to her a little girl whose life had but the day before been nearly crushed out of her by an accident, lay with that pathetic look of reliant resignation on her face that only children have. Further on, a strong woman wrestling still with the effects of her last orgies in delirium startled those who were passing into a hastier step. Next to her, steeped in a great patience that puts all puny efforts to attain to it to the blush,

was one who, smitten with a sore disease, had just been pronounced "incurable," a case to make the hardest weep, for she who was condemned was young and pretty and guileless; and yet she suffered as the sinner suffered, and meekly acknowledged that she did so by the grace of God, and this was the one whom Mrs. Garth had ventured here to see. A favourite servant, one whom she had known from a little child, a poor young blighted creature for whom "surely Mr. Theed could do something?" Mrs. Garth questioned eagerly, when she found that gentleman standing by the narrow bed.




## CHAPTER V.

### THE FIRST SACRIFICE.

THUS at last she saw her hero at his work !  
saw him in the midst of the scenes in which her imagination had often depicted him. Not much of a hero according to the conventional type, no young Apollo risking his life for name and fame in the annals of medical science : but a middle-aged man, no longer young, who had in middle life deliberately sacrificed all his worldly prospects for the sake of pursuing a path in which he could more largely benefit humanity, than he could have done had he remained out of it. A serious-faced, earnest-eyed man, with not even the stamp of genius upon him, was this hero of Mrs. Garth's.

In the course of their brief daily intercourse by her sick servant's couch, the lady made open confessions both of her aspirations to do good, and of her first attempt and failure. " I feel now that there would be something tricky





and melodramatic in my going out of my way to find out people to help," she said despondingly, "and yet I do feel so dissatisfied with myself."

"Do what comes in your way," he suggested.

"Then I shall do nothing, for nothing comes in my way, excepting applications to give to great charities that seem to me like abstractions; they don't come home to me."

"But they do to thousands of our fellow-creatures who would perish without them; you are quarrelling with your privileges; the greatest blessing you enjoy is the power to give freely."

"I want a more individual interest in that sort of work; if I could give some time and labour, and sympathy, I should feel I was doing what is not quite so easy to me as giving money."

"You are very anxious to bring a sacrifice," he said quietly, "should you ever be called upon to make one I hope you will have the grace to do it willingly." And then she was called upon to make one at once, for her hero left, and the eyes of the sick girl pleaded that her mistress should read to her.

So on for another weary time of disquietude *of heart*, the soul of the woman who had nothing

to wish for herself, sighed for some call for self-abnegation to be made upon her—sighed to do something which should give her the moral right to feel that it was not only out of her abundance that she gave freely, but that it had been at some cost to herself. In time she was asked a heavy price, and she paid it.

After knowing the son well for a time, it came about that there should be a slight degree of intimacy spring up between his mother and sister, and Mrs. Garth. The old lady was harsh and unforgiving to her son in these days; she bluntly avowed that she had altered her will and left everything to her daughter, since Arthur had chosen to rule his life so diametrically opposite to the way which seemed good to her. But she softened a little when friends spoke to her of the rich young widow, to whom Arthur was such a hero, and sought that lady and loved to hear a stranger praise those very qualities and deeds in her son which most woke her own anger against him.

The old lady who loved power and money and her children, had suffered much painful warfare in her soul very often through the clashing together of these three loves of hers. But she had never suffered so much and so deservedly as she did now about Arthur. Her dread of the possible poverty which might be

his portion when she was dead and he could no longer have what she still gave him, a home, fought with her dislike to the career he had entered upon, and her determination that she would not aid and abet any such aim as his by the help of that money which could not sway him. She was very bitter against him, very much wounded by that cruelly independent spirit of his which made him go on his path cheerfully, without ever seeking to turn her from hers. Yet for all this bitterness of spirit, for all this wounded self-love, she did love her son dearly, did long for his temporal good, though she would do nothing to assure this latter while he opposed her wishes.

Accordingly it pleased her well that another hand should seem ready and willing to be extended to offer him help, sympathy, encouragement, all that men need in fact, and that only women can give: a hand that was weighted well with gold too; a hand that could do for her son all that Lady Theed could not do now without abrogating her claim to rule her son, ay, in all things.


So favouring breezes blew upon their friendship, freshening it, making it appear as pleasant and natural, and good a thing in the eyes of others as it was in their own. Fostered thus on *all sides*, cemented by sympathy for the same

objects, by interest in the same causes abroad, and by all that fawningly domestic favour at home which interested relatives on either side are prompt to show, it became a dearer thing to the heart of the woman than the love of her girlhood had been. Dearer and loftier, for it opened up to her the prospect of a life spent in learning the sweet art from one who could well instruct her, of doing the utmost good which it was in her power to do. Lady Theed said to her daughter, when the hope which had been shadowed forth became almost certainty, "My only fear is that between them, all will go; if he asks her to give her dowry to endow a hospital she will do it." He asked her to do something harder than this that his mother had mentioned, as the sharpest test to which he could put her affection.

This is no ordinary love story which I am writing. There were no heart-burnings from jealousies unfounded or the reverse connected with it. These people were both very real and true, and so until they were both well satisfied that their love for each other was the same, they kept quiet about it. Indeed they never treated it as the emotional exciting plaything it is made by some people. It was felt to be a serious matter by both of them, whether they were fitted to be helps and comforts to each

other, whether their union would enable them to serve God and their fellow-creatures, with a more complete and fuller service, or whether it would lessen their desire to be always striving, always working for others rather than themselves. These were felt to be serious questions, and while they were struggling to solve them, they did not waste the hours in watching one another in society, or in sham doubts and misgivings.

He came to Mrs. Garth perplexed one day. Perplexed and a little out of heart about a great scheme of mercy in which he had been an active agent, and in the progress of which he had awakened her purest most womanly interest. This was the building and maintenance of a home for fallen women who were willing to repent and amend : an establishment that was to be under the superintendence of several resident Sisters of Mercy, and of the clergy of the place in which it was situated, one that had proved itself good on a smaller scale, and that all those concerned in it had hoped to open on a far wider one at this time of which I write. It had proved itself good. Many had been rescued through its agency ; many more were craving to be rescued. The beautiful calming influence of the actual presence, the daily life of the devoted women who have been *found ready* to sacrifice not only the pleasures



of the world, but the indulgence of home affections, of the tastes and habits of refinement and cultivation, upon those other women who had sacrificed themselves in so fearfully different a way, had told as such noble works will tell. It was to no tale of failure connected with the organization and administration of this House of Mercy, that Mrs. Garth had to listen now. It was to a tale of the falling short of funds now, when they were most needed, of a glorious work left incomplete, of strong efforts made without much hope of success, for time was pressing and the workmen employed upon it must disperse soon unless something most unlooked for occurred.

Something most unlooked for did occur. The whole motive of this scheme as well as the manner of it appealed strongly to the heart of the woman who had first been moved to think at all of such things by the prayer—

“That it may please Thee to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.”

“And I can do nothing !” she had cried in despair when this prayer first went home to her heart. But now she knew better and said happily, “But I can do something, for this cause that is so dear to us both.” Then she

lifted her voice, for she had sunk it almost to a whisper in speaking the last two words, and told him what she could do, and what she would do.

"I can draw out £1000 to-morrow; will that be any—much use?"

"It would be everything, the saving of the Home," he told her.

"Well, that I know I can have; I have been told over and over again, that I can draw that if my income should not suffice at any time; then I can do more, Mr. Theed, I can give £500 a year as a subscription."

"If you can do that without too much impoverishing yourself—" he was beginning.

"Ah! I won't let you talk in that way, you who would impoverish yourself without so much as an instant's hesitation: I shall have enough to live on after that, not to live as I do now of course, but just to live."

"We shall both be satisfied with what my mother will consider a shockingly humble way of living," he said brightly: and after this identification of himself with her, it came to be an understood thing that however hard the battle of life might be, they were to fight it together as man and wife.

Her hero was more than ever a hero to her *now*. These unrecorded triumphs which he

achieved through all manner of trials of which the world also knew little, were dearer, prouder things to her than any that had ever been blazoned forth about any one else. As constant unfettered communication with him unfolded his character to her day by day, she came to feel that it was a nobler loftier one than she had believed it to be, even in the first flash of her admiration. It would be a good thing for her, an ennobling thing for her to live under this man's influence. Selfishness, meanness, coldness, indolence, could not exist in his atmosphere. His simplicity of heart, of life, of conduct, destroyed shams. A less impressionable woman even than Mrs. Garth, would find it a hard matter to live any other life than a tender conscience would approve, under the auspices of the earnest, true, untiring man who followed out so accurately his own pure ideas of duty. So her love became a living truth, strengthened by her reason and conscience, a thing that it would be harder than death to part with while its object remained unaltered.



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SECOND SACRIFICE.

WITHOUT stating to the lawyer who had managed her affairs since her husband's death anything relative to the destination of the £1000 which she "needed immediately," Mrs. Garth drew that sum out and sent it to the building fund. Soon after this, she had notice from Mr. Theed that a great treat was in store for her. He offered her a ticket which would enable her to be present at the opening of the chapel and new portions of the House of Mercy in ——shire.

It must be owned here, that the bright little citizen of the world to "whom all this sort of thing was so new," as she said herself, started on this excursion with rather a dubious feeling as to the possible impression "such an assemblage got together for such a purpose," could make on her. The old traditions of her girlhood, and her young matronhood clung about

her still, " 'Twas pity, 'twas true, an' still 'twas pity," that such things were. But, all those scenes of actual contact of vice with virtue were emotional and painful, and hysterics-engendering, so she had heard from people who had been to midnight meetings of tea and tears at Exeter Hall. She knew that if affecting appeals were made in touching tones amidst all those adjuncts of commiseration and repentance which she was prepared to see, that it " would be very trying," as women term it. So she went with mixed feelings, and came away with unmingled ones.

Somehow or other, she could hardly tell why, but it was so, Mrs. Garth went expecting to be pained by the sight of bareness and plainness in all things connected with this institution. She took its purpose into consideration, and recalling all the old Puritan harsh traditions which had influenced the minds of those by whom her mind was influenced of old, she pictured to herself ungraceful forms, and cold or inharmonious colours. And she almost shuddered as she drove from the station to the leafy nook of the world in which that House of Mercy reared its head, as she thought of the poor sinners repenting in the midst of surroundings designed to make them feel that they had lost the right the poorest creature has to

the fairest colours, and finest forms in creation. Deep pity for all this took possession, pity and repugnance too ! But this feeling was merged in one of even more intense sympathy since there was lively hope in it, as she got out and passed through the gothic oaken door, into the well-proportioned entrance hall. The key-note of the whole place was struck in that plan of entrance, there was nothing superfluous, no overloading of decoration, no sham effect, nothing that was obviously for show and not for use. But there was no part of it on which the eye could not rest with a sense of satisfaction.

This feeling deepened when she found herself in the chapel, where quiet beauty was expressed in purity of form, and mellow richness, not sombreness of colour. Here again it was evident that superfluity of ornamentation, and lavishness of decoration had been carefully avoided. But on the altar and reredos it was made manifest that the designers and rulers of this building had brought their highest resources of wealth and art to bear. There in the white grace of alabaster were the delicately wrought figures of angels, clustered round and about the window that formed the centre piece, and marble steps polished and perfect on which a thousand coloured sunbeams played through *the tinted glass*, led up to the enriched spot.

And all this had been the special gift of one Sister of Mercy, of one devotee who had given gifts of even greater worth to the cause—her life, her presence, her bright example.

It was all so different to what Mrs. Garth had half expected, half feared it would be. The solemn prayers which were offered up in the service of dedicating this edifice to God, were not more free from the emotional, melodramatic form of appeal than was the sermon that followed them: a sermon in which it was stated so simply, so tersely, so clearly what the end and aim of this establishment was, that the dullest must have understood it, while the most sensitive could not have been wounded by it. It was a great manly-hearted Christian appeal to the humanity of those who heard him, on behalf of that humanity which had been disfigured (but not destroyed) by sin and sorrow, and suffering. It was a generous succinct setting forth of facts that are too much overlooked by many who know nothing of the inner working of Sisterhood life. It was an eloquent tribute to the zeal, to the cheerfulness, to the active piety, to the unceasing industry, to the mighty power of self-abnegation, which characterises the Sister of Mercy. He spoke feelingly, with the strength of one who is thoroughly imbued with the truth of that

which he is saying, of the great living influence for good, which the vitalised routine of purity and labour, as seen in the presence of the Sisterhood amongst the penitent women, had upon these latter: an influence which is necessarily more powerful than any individual example, however fraught with purity, contentment, and laboriousness the latter may be: an influence that it is impossible to overestimate, and that we can only hope may be widely extended: an influence that is the offspring of so nobly tender a sympathy for fallen humanity, as to have in it some element of the divine.

Nature too, had been consulted and made to bring her subtlest influence to bear upon the minds of those for whose good all this work was done. The House of Mercy stood on as fair a slope, fronting as beautiful a view as can be seen in the land. Hill and dale, wood and water, contributed their choicest combinations to the general effect of the scheme. Those who had fallen through their lowest senses, should have every chance given them of being restored by their higher ones.

"It was a noble aim, which that building and that assemblage represented," Mrs. Garth felt when she left at last. "That it might prosper," was her fervent prayer.

The homeward journey was undertaken in a

very different spirit to the one she had taken the day before. It was impressed upon her now that this work which she had seen inaugurated this day, or rather not "inaugurated," for it had been working for some time, but freshly established in greater propriety and comfort—it was impressed upon her that it was no piece of tinsel sensationalism got up in haste to be repented of at leisure. Under whatever difficulties it existed, it would exist with the tenacity which truth and earnestness give. These men and women who had given themselves to it had pledged more than their money and their time to its continuance. The subscription of half her income which she had promised seemed but a poor thing beside these richer gifts.

Soon the happy thoughts of her approaching marriage filled her mind to the exclusion of most other things. She no longer had to bewail herself about having an insufficiency of occupation or of motive-power. At last it became needful that her future husband should see her late husband's lawyer: Mrs. Garth had no copy of the will.

From the lawyer Mr. Theed learned that Colonel Garth had by a codicil to his will limited the enjoyment of his property by his widow, to the period of her widowhood. The clause, however, had not yet been fully communicated

to Mrs. Garth, but any further concealment of such an important fact was now impossible. She was summoned, and when she attended, Colonel Garth's last will and resolve respecting her was made known.

It was this, that "in the event of her ever marrying again, the whole of the property was to pass from her at once to a second or third cousin," whose sole claim on the testator was that he bore the name of Garth.

She went away home, and decided at once that no false scruples of delicacy should prevent her telling Mr. Theed that if he was willing to take her penniless she would rather be his wife than the richest widow in the kingdom. "I always sighed to make sacrifices," she said, half laughing; "now, Arthur, see how willingly I will make one for you."

Then he took her hand,—she was the only woman he had ever loved, and it was hard!—and told her "there was yet another sacrifice asked of them both,—a bitter but a needful one; if she married him her power to keep her promise respecting the subscription to that great work to which but the other day she had believed herself capable of sacrificing everything, would be over."

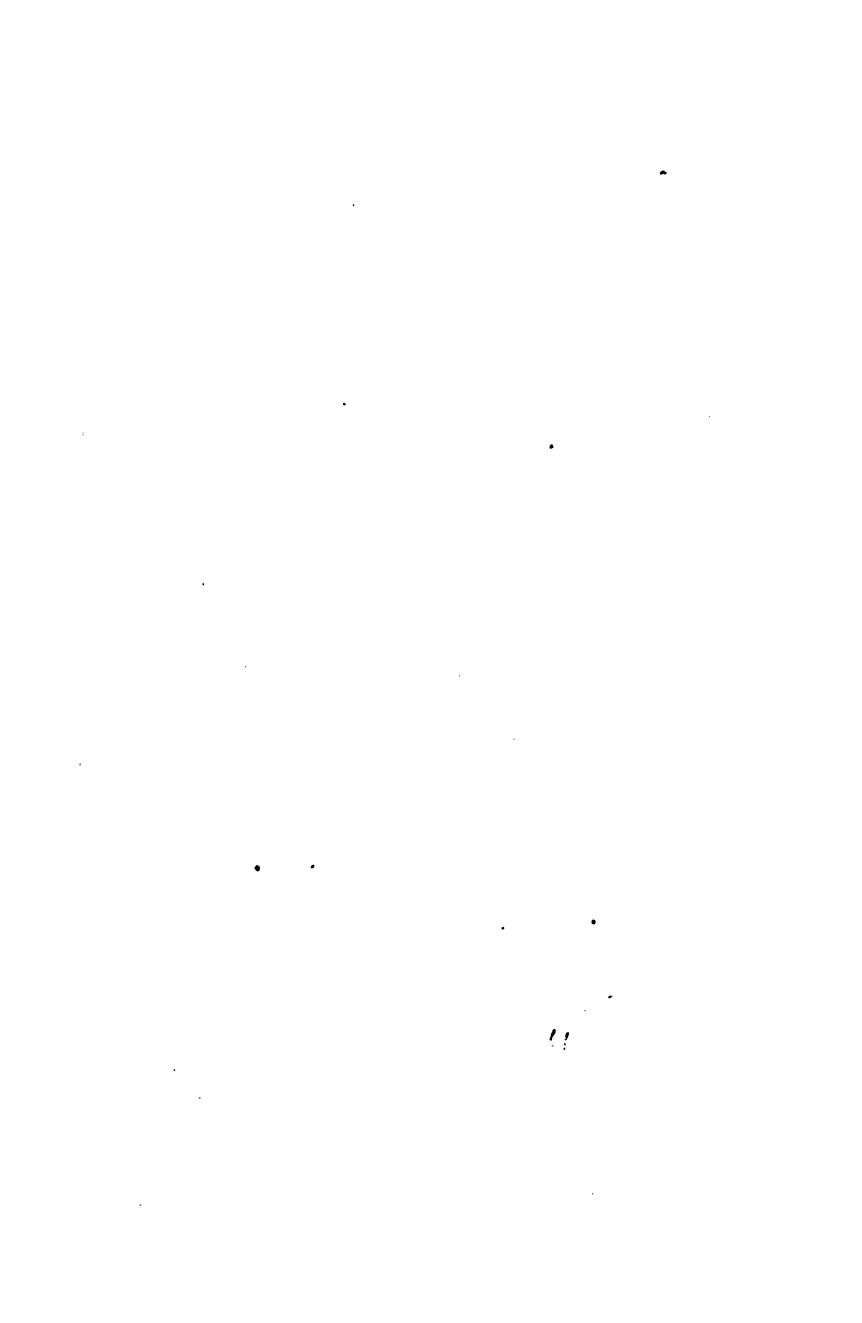
The struggle need not be depicted. All that *remains to be told* is that the subscription was *paid religiously*.

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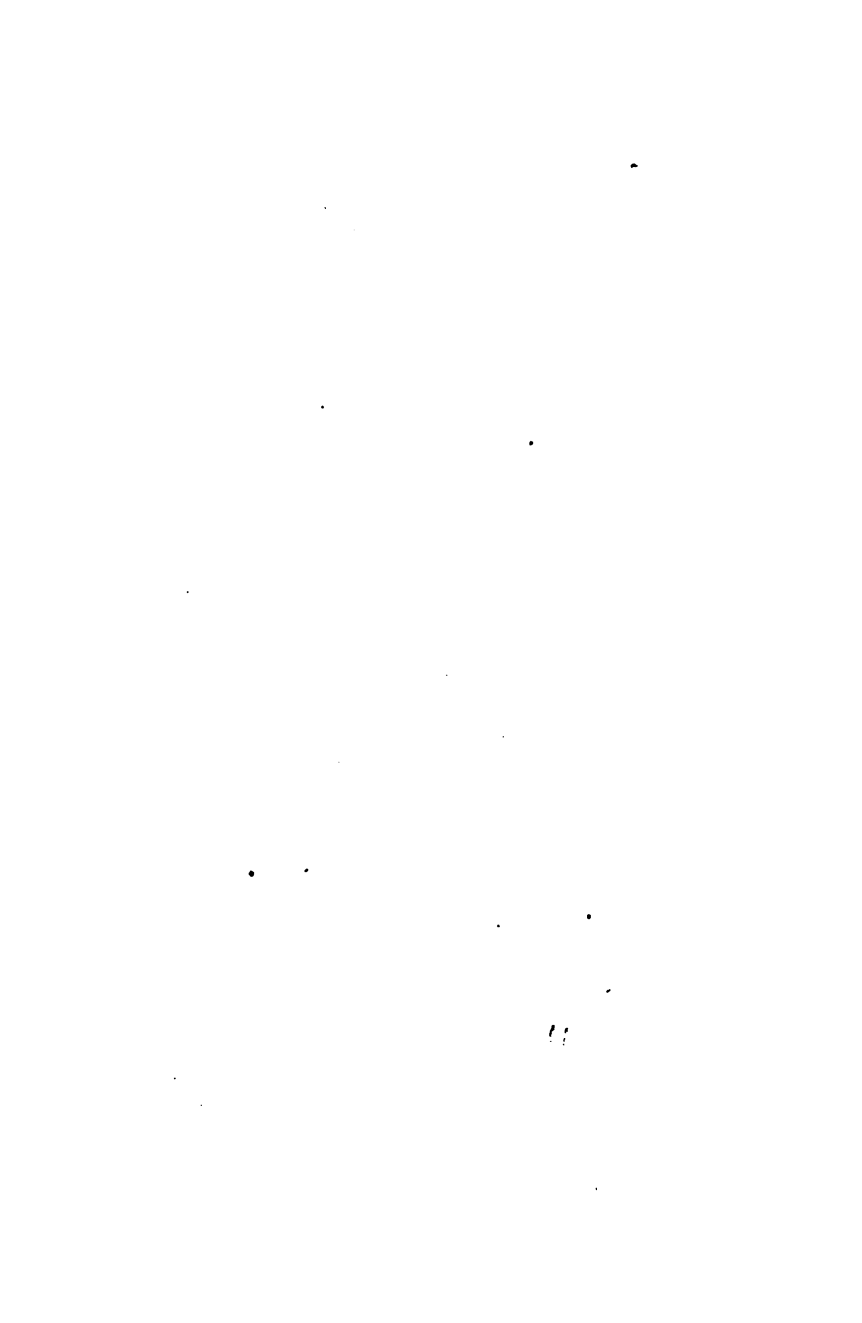




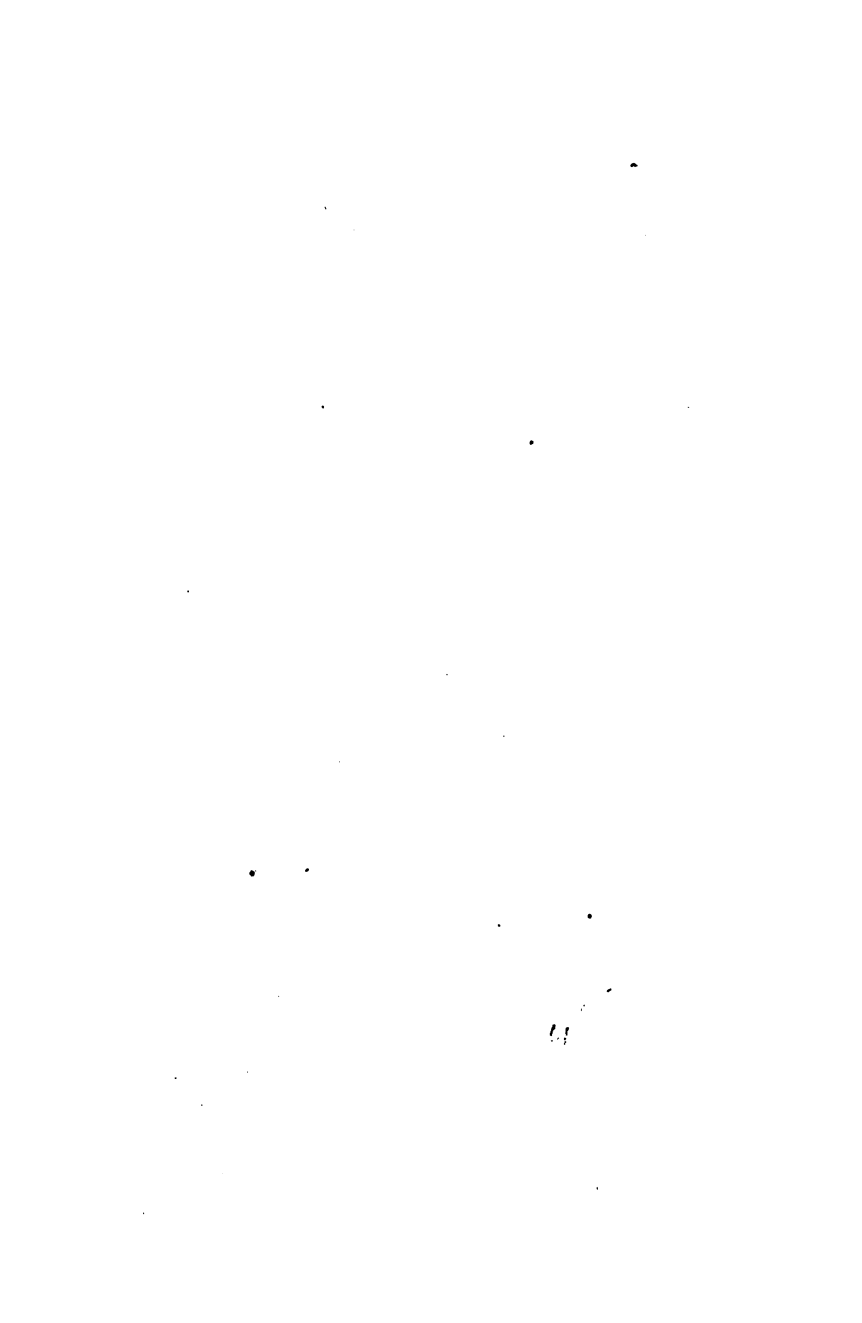














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